

# County Organization

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## **King County Government And Background**

The County consists of 2,128 square miles, ranking 11<sup>th</sup> in geographical size among Washington State's 39 counties. The County ranks number one in population in the State of Washington and is the financial, economic and industrial center of the Pacific Northwest Region. Currently, there are 37 incorporated cities within the county (not including the newly incorporated city of Kenmore) which account for 72% of its population.

King County operates under a Home Rule Charter adopted by a vote of the citizens of King County in 1968 and is organized under the Council-Executive form of county government. The Metropolitan King County Council is the policy-making legislative body of the County. The Council's thirteen members are elected by district to four-year staggered terms and serve on a full-time basis. The County Council sets tax levies, makes appropriations, and adopts and approves the annual operating and capital budgets for the County. Other elected County officials include the County Executive, Prosecuting Attorney, Sheriff, and Assessor. Except for the Sheriff, all of these are partisan positions, elected at large to four-year terms.

The County Executive serves as the chief executive officer for the County. The County Executive presents to the Council annual statements of the County's financial and governmental affairs, the proposed budget and capital improvement plans. The County Executive signs, or causes to be signed on behalf of the County, all deeds, contracts, and other instruments, and appoints the director of each of thirteen executive departments.

King County provides some services on a countywide regional basis and some local services only to unincorporated areas. Within appropriate jurisdictions, the County provides public transportation, road construction and maintenance, water quality, flood control, parks and recreation facilities and services, court services, law enforcement, inquests, tax assessments and collections, fire inspections, planning, zoning, animal control, criminal detention, rehabilitative services, public health care, election administration, and the processing and disposal of solid waste. In addition, the County has contracts with some cities to provide local services to incorporated areas of the County.

The reporting entity "King County" includes three component units, the Harborview Medical Center, the Washington State Major Leagues Baseball Stadium Public Facilities District (PFD), and the Flood Control Zone Districts Fund. The Harborview Medical center, the history of which dates back to 1877, is a comprehensive 330-bed health care facility operated by the University of Washington since 1967 under a management contract. The physical plant is owned by the County. The PFD is responsible for overseeing the construction and future operation of the new baseball stadium. The Flood Control Zone Districts Fund accounts for the undertaking, operation, or maintenance of flood control projects or storm water control projects that are of special benefit to specified areas of the County.

Most funds in this report pertain to the entity King County Government. Certain Agency Funds pertain to the County's custodianship of assets belonging to independent governments and

special districts (These funds are not shown in the budget books.) Under State statute and the County's Home Rule Charter, the King County Executive is the ex officio treasurer of all special purpose districts of King County, but not of cities and towns. As provided by County ordinance, the Finance Director is responsible for the duties of the comptroller and treasurer. Monies received from or for the special purpose districts are deposited in a central bank account. The Finance Director invests or disburses monies according to the instructions of the respective special purposes districts governing body or administrative officer.<sup>1</sup>

The table on the following page shows the number of governmental entities within geographical King County, as well as the number of elected officials. It is with these jurisdictions that the County is negotiating on which governments should deliver which services, and how those services can be paid for. Potentially, the most important subject of this forum is the transition of King County into a true regional service provider as well as fulfill Washington State's growth management goal that all urban areas be part of a city.

### **Organizational Chart**

An appropriation unit is a legal entity authorized by the County Council to make expenditures and to incur obligations for specific purposes. Examples of appropriations units are Records and Elections, Office of the Prosecuting Attorney, Public Health, and Solid Waste. At King County, appropriation units are budgeted on a calendar year basis.

Similar appropriation units are combined together to make up a department. For example, the Department of Transportation is made up of the following similar appropriation units: Transit, Road Services, Fleet Administration, and Transportation Planning and Administration. The departments are headed by a director, who reports directly to the Deputy County Executive. Each director is a member of the Executive's Cabinet.

A program area is a grouping of County appropriation units (agencies) or departments with related Countywide goals. Under each program area, individual agencies or departments participate in activities to support the program area goals. In the organizational chart, four program areas are highlighted in color to give the reader a visual representation of how departments are organized within the program areas. The budget process distinguishes between six program areas: Physical Environment, General Government, Health and Human Services, Law, Safety and Justice, Debt Service and Capital Projects. Debt Service and Capital Improvement are not shown on the County organizational chart.

Most of the narrative information in the Budget Book is focused along program areas, with breakdowns by department. In the Appendix to the Budget Book, the detail information is organized by program area, department, and then by appropriation unit. Throughout each book, the reader will see tables that roll-up appropriation unit to the department and program area levels.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: King County "Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, pg vii –viii, 1996.